Chapter - III

The Denuded Trees

The success myth and the great American dream have more negative impacts on the lives of the Americans. The mad craving for success exerts enormous pressure on the average Americans who, unable to cope with the ever-increasing demands of the society, have become mere abject abstractions. Healthy human relationship becomes a thing of the past, resulting in the mushrooming of alienated individuals. Human relationships, even within the family, have received damaging cracks, leading to marital misunderstandings. And, the American concept of nuclear family, which, according to dictionaries, is a basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, considered as a group, whether dwelling together or not, stands denuded of joy and unity. Albee has been, right from his Off-Broadway adventures, preoccupied with the familial frictions in his affluent American society.

The word “family,” in human context, refers to a group of people living together usually under one roof. In most societies around the world, it is the
the basic unit for raising children. It is indeed the principal institution for the socialization of children. The nuclear family, also known as the conjugal family, consists of a husband, wife and children, while the extended family includes, besides the members of the nuclear family, the parents of either the husband or the wife or even both. The concept of family is also used to control our sexual behaviour in general.

This chapter intends to study Albee’s humanistic inclination towards the annoying disintegration of the nuclear family. Bigsby considers Albee as “a post-nuclear” writer. While for Bigsby the term “post nuclear” clearly designates the post war period in American drama, for Reka M. Cristian, a Senior Assistant Professor at the Department of American Studies, University of Szeged, Hungary, it has a wider sense. In the opinion of the Hungarian, the term can be extended to mean the playwright’s handling of “the disintegration of American nuclear family and the painful state of domestic affairs in the context of the excessively consumerist society of the post war era” (1).
Though critics trace down elements of Albee’s life in the depiction of families in his plays, his chief concerns are not merely the expression of what he has lost in his personal life. On the other hand, he is very much concerned with the tumbling crumble of the basic social institution called family. Albee is aware of the meaning and importance of the nuclear family. He was orphaned by his biological parents. Though adopted by a rich family, he was only a poor victim of the richness. His longing for a dream nuclear family is completely in contradiction with what he personally experienced and what the others in his affluent American society experienced. By his powerful portrayals of marital strife, he has only tried to give a rude jolt to the things (the American dream and the unfettered enthusiasm of the people for material prosperity) that unsettles life in the families. Albee’s portrayal has clearly revealed that the term “family is no longer anything but a word, a hollow institution, an outmoded convention” (Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal, 33).

The nuclear or elementary family centres basically on a married couple. Love and affection
and high regard for moral values are the very foundations of a happy successful married life. Success and happiness in life is normally measured in terms of healthy affinity among the members of one family. But, the emergence of industrialization and capitalism and the economic expansions after the World Wars have changed all. With the new wealth, the growing middle class moves to the suburbs where they find spacious homes, get better education for children and have feelings of greater social security. With these rapid economical expansions, people have started measuring success and happiness only in financial terms. Money and material affluence occupies the core of modern life (actually the core of grief of modern life), clearly replacing love, affection and moral values. Bigsby rightly observes: “Individuals... are held together not by freely acknowledged emotional or moral bonds but by money. Love threatens to become simply form of currency” (p.296). Degraded into viable financial units, the basic family structure simply falls apart.

Over the years, Albee has observed several decades of American society as well as the changes in the attitudes and values of the American population.
In almost all his plays, he looks at the American family, its various manifestations and criticises it, mocks at it, and more importantly reveals its dishonesty. The chief concern of Albee in relation to family is the allegiance within marriages. The relationship between the husband and wife is of paramount importance for a healthy social unit and thereby a promising society. Unfortunately, this aspect is sadly marred and surely vanished from the lives of the people of the town in the 1960s. Almost all the couples, both on and off stage, in his plays are discontent in their marriages.

Jerry’s mother has deserted her husband and son and “embarked on an adulterous turn of our southern states... a journey of a year’s duration... and her most constant companion... among others, among many others...was a Mr.Barleycon” (ZS, 11). Albee does not give any details about the married life of Jerry’s parents but the “adulterous turn” has clearly suggested that all is not well with them. Besides seeking adventures outside the marriage, she fails in her role pattern as woman. When she deserted Jerry, he was only ten and half years old. The young boy was deprived of a caring mother in his most formative
years. She was certainly after happiness but, in the process, destroyed the happiness of her husband and young son. The story of Jerry’s mother is just a tip of an iceberg that Albee intends to fathom out.

Jerry’s mother is an offstage character and her adultery may not have any serious impact on the audience. But with that character, Edward Albee has clearly questioned the frames of what the nuclear family was meant to represent: the indestructible unity of powerful fathers, beautiful, dutiful, loving mothers, and wise, nice children. In Jerry’s life, the frames are but empty.

The first couple that Albee theater presents on the stage are Mommy and Daddy, the principal characters in two of Albee’s early one act plays. They first appear in *The Sandbox*. As it has been already stated in the previous chapter, the play requires only fourteen minutes for its presentation on the stage and within these fourteen minutes, Albee has quite efficiently managed to present their sterile couplehood which is also indicative of the banality of their life. Mommy, like almost all other women characters of Albee, of course with the exception of Grandma, is domineering and aggressive.
In fact, Mommy feels like the head of the family. Her husband, like the other husbands in his other plays, is emasculated and submissive. Whatever Mommy says is heeded and unquestionably final for Daddy.

The words of Thomas E. Porter may be very apt here to describe the kind of communication these two characters have between them. They “converse without communicating anything” (225). The couple cannot communicate because they have nothing meaningful and new to say. The following conversation in the play The Sandbox is enough to reiterate that they have nothing meaningful and nothing new to talk to each other.

Daddy: Shall we talk to each other?
Mommy: Well, you can talk, if you want to ... if you think of anything to say... if you think of anything new.
Daddy: (Thinks) No... I suppose not.
Mommy: (With a triumphant laugh) Of course not! (SB 38)

Marriage is uniquely beneficial to societies because it is the very foundation of the families. When this fundamental social unit called marriage is in disarray, the family tree is sure to get denuded. Albee is all pains to see the concept of matrimony becoming a mere means to achieve a financial security promised by the American Dream. Allegiance in
connubial life has no longer been based on love, with money replaces it at the core of life.

The cruel and aggressive Mommy has married an emasculated Daddy for his money. Daddy is rich and has “money... money... money” (SB 39). In fact, Mommy has married only money and since Daddy is the owner of all the money. This point is made even clearer when the bossy Mommy, this time in The American Dream, declares:

I can live off you, because I married you...I have a right to live off you because I married you, and because I used to let you get on top of me and bump your uglies; and I have a right to all your money when you die. (92)

These words of Mommy are a clear reflection of the detestable attitude of women of the period of economical expansion in America. For her, marriage is only a means of future security. Because she married Daddy, she thinks she has every right to live of him. Marriage gives licence to intimacy between the husband and wife and that intimacy is what strengthens the bond between the two. But for Mommy the sacred intimacy means a means to money. She allows him to get on top of her while all the time keeping her eyes on the wealth of Daddy. She clearly
fails in her role pattern as woman. Not simply failing, she abjectly forgets that she is his wife. By confessing that she allows him for his money, she belittles herself to the level of a sex-worker. The painful fact that Albee wants to convey is that Mommy is not the only one but a representative of all the women of her society. Even the death of her husband is seen by her as an opportunity to claim a right to all his money. It is really shocking to learn that even death fails to deter the unfettered enthusiasm of people for money.

The same view is also echoed by Nurse in The Death of Bessie Smith and Martha in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? In the sixth scene of the play The Death of Bessie Smith, when Intern asks Nurse to marry him, this is what Nurse comes out with:

I am sick of this talk... Forty-six dollars a month! Isn’t that right? Isn’t that what you make? Forty-six dollars a month! Boy, you can’t afford even to think about marrying. You can’t afford marriage...Best you can afford is lust. That’s the best you can afford. (DBS 66)

Money matters in marriage. Nurse has a very clear notion about the importance of money in marriage. Forty-six dollars a month (in the 1960s) is not enough for Intern to think about marrying Nurse. The
salary is good only for lust! Nurse thinks only about the salary of Intern. She conveniently forgets the amount she earns every month. The role pattern of man in American society makes him the bread winner of the family. It is his responsibility to be the earner to provide not only bread but all the other comforts also. The comforts promised by the consumerist culture of post-war era. With that meagre forty-six dollars, Intern can only think about lust and not a happy comfortable family. Nurse rejects Intern as he is not her successful man, her "knight." Here, the playwright has thrown sufficient light on what causes disappointment in marriage -- the undue expectations of women and the pressure mounted on the men because of the undue expectations of their women.

Martha too is preoccupied with the money George earns as an Associate Professor of History. At the end of the first act (Fun and Games) of the play, George, unable to control his anger, "breaks a bottle against the portable bar..." (VW 80). This sudden aggressive posture by George shocks the guests but not his wife who, continuing in the same deriding vein, comments: "I hope that was an empty bottle,
George. You don’t want to waste good liquor... not on your salary. Not on an Associate Professor’s salary” (VW 93). Unlike Nurse and Mommy, Martha does not belong to a poor family. She is the only daughter of her father who is rich enough to run a college. The feeling of social security has never been a thorn in her flesh. However, she is also moulded by the high ideals of her affluent society. She wants her husband to earn more like the other men of his time. The desperate desire to lead a (financially) comfortable and thereby a successful life is the root cause of most of the failures of men in their roles as husbands.

Money remains a concern for Nurse, Mommy and even for the rich Martha. The Wife and the Mistress in All Over and the old woman called A in Three Tall Women are the other women characters who have an insatiable desire for money. The material drive has been a passion not only for the female characters of Albee. It also infects the young men of the well-heeled American society. Nick, the young faculty member who has recently joined the department of Biology is ambitious and surely after money. He too used the institution of marriage to further his
financial stability. Nick has no love for Honey. He married her because he thought she was pregnant. He married her when she “blew up.” After the marriage, she “went down” and it was a hysterical pregnancy. Unfortunately for Nick there was no going back and he reconciled to his lot as the husband of Honey. He lives with Honey who has plenty of money. Like the typical youth of his society, Nick too is ambitious and is deeply infected with the desire for money.

Coming back to Albee’s first on stage couple and their sterile couplehood, it can be stated that the characters of Mommy and Daddy are but a veritable caricature of the artificial affinities of modern life. The highly artificial and often lifeless relationship between these two is further elaborated in the longer version of the play *The American Dream*. Though Albee calls it a one scene play, the play seems to have many scenes or at least many regrouping of characters.

Though the play is a nightmarish mad-cap cartoon examining the substitution of artificial for real values in the society, it also deals with the institution of marriage and the family. When the play was first produced in New York, Albee received
accolades for this new venture. He also met with accusations of nihilism, immorality, and defeatism. But, this play is certainly affirmative. Albee has endeavoured only to bring out the reality of the highly contaminated American family. Anne Paolucci rightly observes that, “In Albee’s hands the polemic against the American family becomes a commentary on all human relationships” (9).

In this play, Albee investigates materialism, opportunism and hypocrisy built into the kind of marriage which is used as a social device for passing on property and producing children. Again he exposes the villainy of conformism and spiritual aridity, and emphasizes the dangers of emotional crippling in the family. He is seriously concerned with the void between husband and wife, parent and child, as well as with the problem of the rejection of the aged. (Poet of Loss 25). Materialism drains human beings of all the essential humane qualities.

Lee Baxandall, in his article “The Theatre of Edward Albee,” classified Albee’s archetypal family into three generations: “Then, the epoch of a still-dynamic national ethic and vision; Now, a phase which breaks down into several tangents of decay; and
Nowhere, a darkly prophesied future generation” (Tulane Drama Review, Summer, 1965, p.20). Only Grandma and the patriarch or paterfamilias, who is occasionally mentioned but never appears on the stage, belongs to the Then generation. While Grandma and the paterfamilias belong to the previous one, Mommy and Daddy and all their variants in the other plays of Albee are the most clear-cut representatives of the Now generation. Especially the character of Mommy symbolises the transitional figure of her generation. She, and not Daddy, takes an interest in practical enterprise; she inherits the male aggressiveness. Though she delights in power, she is glaringly incompetent as the moral steward of her generation. She is mean-spirited, immoderate, insincere, and inclined to hysteria. She makes up with wildness what she lacks in confidence.

Since a detailed account of the plot of the play has already been given in the previous chapter, I have confined my analysis only to the portrayal of the sort of relationship that exists between Mommy and Daddy as evidence to prove the decay in familial relationship in the modern American society. The opening section of the play concentrates on the
domineering features of Mommy and the process of emasculation of Daddy. When the play opens, the couple has been anxiously waiting for people to come to fix the Johnny in their bathroom. They are late and Mommy does not know what can be keeping them. Daddy feels cheated by them because in the past when he took the apartment, they were quick to have me sign the lease; they were quick enough to take my cheque for two month’s rent in advance... and one month’s security. They were quick enough to check my references; they were quick enough about all that. But now, try to get the icebox fixed, try to get the doorbell fixed, try to get the leak in the Johnny fixed! Just try it...they aren’t so quick about that. (AD 86)

These words of Daddy lead Mommy to come out with her story about buying a beige-coloured hat. She wants her husband to pay complete attention to her words.

Mommy: ....I went to buy a new hat yesterday. (Pause) I said, I went to buy a new hat yesterday.
Daddy: Oh! Yes...yes.
Mommy: Pay attention.
Daddy: I am paying attention, Mommy.
Mommy: Well, be sure you do.
Daddy: Oh, I am.
Mommy: All right, Daddy; now listen.
Daddy: I’m listening, Mommy.
Mommy: You’re sure!
Daddy: Yes...yes, I’m sure, I’m all ears.
Mommy: (Giggles at the thought; then) All right, now. I went to buy a new hat
yesterday and I said, ‘I’d like a new hat, please.’ And so, they showed me a few hats, green ones and blue ones, and I didn’t like any of them, not one but. What did I say? What did I just say?

Daddy: You didn’t like any on them, not one bit. Mommy: That’s right; you just keep paying attention. (AD 86)

The detailed, rather long and boring, account of the story of how she has bought a hat proves that the exchanges between the couple are often pointless and meaningless. Even to her boring accounts, Mommy wants "you just keep paying attention" (AD 88). She is clearly the head of the family, with all her male aggressiveness, she wants each and everything in her household to happen as per her wishes. She wants Daddy to dance to all her tunes which he sincerely does. Of course her bossing over attitude fails to bear any fruit when it comes to ordering Grandma who belongs to elderly generation.

There is no real love blossoming between the couple. The power of love which the anti-hero of The Zoo Story tried to understand seems to have vanished in this play as love finds no place in the lives of the two main characters of the play. Mommy has married Daddy not out of true love for him. She wanted social security and that security she finds in
her marriage with Daddy and so she accepts him as her life-partner. Even the physical intimacy that their marriage grants them is devoid of any feelings of love, and that even the sexual liberties in their life seem beyond possibilities. Daddy is feminized through a series of tropes that emasculate him. He has had an operation in which “the doctors took out something that was there and put in something that wasn’t there” (AD 83), replacing his penis with a vagina (“the something that wasn’t there” is the female yonic symbol). After the surgery, Daddy “has tubes now, where he used to have tracts” (AD 90).

With Daddy having only tubes, the physical separation of man and woman becomes an inevitable fact. But their physical separation is simply emblematic of their spiritual aridity. Love, both physical and spiritual, is clearly out of place in their life. It collapses under the pressure of Mommy’s domination and Daddy’s visible acquiescence, Mommy is a badgering and manipulative female, the controller and castrator of a defenceless emasculated Daddy. In the opinion of Roudane, Daddy with “his strategy of withdrawal and non-engagement and his
path-of-least-resistance attitude...[,] leads a death-in-life existence” (52).

The traditional American notions of Manhood and Womanhood, and their role patterns are reversed. Though completely emasculated, Daddy still has some remnant desire to be masculine. With tubes there, that desire remains a dream. He is so feminized that he needs Mommy to remind him that he is really a male. While waiting for them to come and fix the Jonny, they have revealed yet another purpose behind their waiting. They are also waiting for the "van people" to come and take away Grandma. The idea of sending Grandma to some hostel comes from Mommy. As usual Daddy, having no other option, accepts the idea. But, when the door bell rings Daddy begins to vacillate, hesitates to open the door.

Daddy:  (Wringing his hands) Oh dear; oh dear.
Mommy:  (Still to Grandma) Just you wait; I’ll fix your wagon. (Now to Daddy) Well, go let them in, Daddy. What are you waiting for?
Daddy: I think we should talk about it some more. Maybe we’ve been hasty...a little hasty, perhaps. (Doorbell rings again) I’d like to talk about it some more.
Mommy: There’s no need. You made up your mind; you were firm; you were masculine and decisive. Daddy: We
might consider the pros and the...

Mommy: I won’t argue with you; it has to be done; you were right. Open the door.

Daddy: But I’m not sure that...

Mommy: Open the door...

Daddy: Was I firm about it?

Mommy: Oh, so firm; so firm.

Daddy: And was I decisive?

Mommy: SO decisive! Oh, I shivered.

Daddy: And masculine? Was I really masculine?

Mommy: Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted. (AD 91)

The reversal of role pattern alone is not the problem between the couple. They are also sterile. They adopted a son. But when they watch in disbelief the failure of their boy- the resentful bumble- to grow into their own version of American dream, they cruelly mutilate him and dismember him from their life. Marriage is a universal institution for the socialization of children. They fail miserably and their life is bereft of the attributes of the ideal family that Albee wants his people to have. He calls into question the myth of the American Dream when he suggests that Mommy and Daddy’s motivation for the physical and spiritual dismemberment of their son stems from their measurement of life and fulfilment completely and fanatically in financial terms.
The marital strife, though deftly dealt with in the early one act plays, is loud and clear only in his first full length drama *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The harangue in the suburb is a powerful expression of discontent marriage. The play is indeed a celebrated dissection of married life in America. Martha, yet another variant of Mommy, is highly disappointed with her husband. She is indeed a product of the consumerist culture which forced people to view everything as property or a means to prosperity. Martha is deeply drenched in such a culture that her expectations are high. It is with this great expectation, she fell for George when he came to the campus as a new faculty member in the department of History. When he falls pathetically short of her expectations, the problem starts for the couple. Their marital journey runs into deep trouble as Martha begins to give vent to all her bent up feelings.

The following aspects are discernible from the night long drinking spree in the suburb of New Carthage. They play presents two couples, two educated couples. Yet, there is no morality in their marriages. The absence of allegiance in marriage is
the first easily noticeable aspect. The institution of marriage controls our sexual behaviour. In the marriage of George and Martha, there is no such control because their marriage is not controlled by love or affection. Martha has been in the habit of seeking sexual adventures outside the marriage. It is not that George is impotent. Martha herself confessed that George is the only person in the world “who has ever...made me happy.” George knows his wife and still accepts the reality, and continues to live with her. Even to George’s great shock, Martha flirts with Nick in his presence and that too in their own drawing room and finally, as a form of revenge, she moves in with Nick who proves to be a flop too. George, the husband alone is not shocked. The delirious digression of Martha is indeed a great shock to all the theatre-goers who watched this play. Albee’s intention is to shock his audience and he has just done that.

Morality seems to have lost its meaning in the affluent consumerist society. The events that unfolded in the drawing room are a clear pointer. It can be argued that Martha’s infidelity and her sexual adventures are a hysterical reflection of her deep
rooted disappointment. It may be contented that her actions are an attempt to escape the hostile (though self-inflicted) realities of her life. Amacher contends that “She is suffering from a long-standing psychological repression of an unsolved problem that the alcoholic intoxication and the consequent events of the play in the third act eventually flush out of deep hiding in the labyrinth of her subconsciousness” (69). Whatever may be the arguments justifying the deluded actions of Martha, the fact remains that she committed adultery. She betrayed the traditional, accepted patterns of life. She violated the promises made at the time of her nuptial hours. She is not faithful to her partner in life. What is more even shocking is her age. She has not just blossomed into a beautiful lass. She is well past the fifties. Her obscene attitude at that age is quite absurd and shocking.

The next factor that can be quite easily noticed is the quarrelsome tone. Quarrelling, the only possible means of communication between Martha and George, is habitual between them. The very opening scene of the play lays bare the uneasy relationship that exists between the two. When the curtain rises,
we hear a crash against the front door, Martha’s laughter, and (as the lights switch on) her opening speech, a protracted oath, “Jesus...H. Christ,” and George’s “Shhhhhh.” These words seem to indicate some degree of inebriety. Martha’s gaze roves the room; and then, imitating Bette Davis, she brays out, “What a dump. Hey, what’s that from? ‘What a dump!’” (VW 4). With these words the quarrel begins, and it speedily rises to a fairly intense pitch to tell the audience that all is not well with this particular marriage. Like Bette Davis in the movie, Martha too is discontent. She is not happy with her husband first for his not so cordial relation with her father. She is also extremely angry with her husband for all his failures ever to “do anything.” “You never do anything,” she tells him, “you never mix. You just sit around and talk” (8). He retorts, “What do you want me to do? Do you want me to act like you? Do you want me to go around all night braying at everybody, the way you do?” (8) And the squabble continues to gain momentum as the play progresses. As it has been already stated, the act of quarrelling is one of the two pillars on which stands their mansion called family life.
The other pillar is their imaginary son. Twenty-three years of married life yields no fruits. They remain childless, clearly wounding the already lacerated life. They put their heads together to create an illusionary son and also decided to keep it a secret between the two. One of the traits of absurd drama is the preference given to illusion. Unable to put up with the excruciating reality, people try to take shelter under illusion. Martha and George have just done that to overcome their sterile life. But Albee frees them from this deadlock by dismantling the myth about their illusionary son, offering them a new opportunity to rebuild their life.

The love-hate relationship between the elderly couple in the play is quite indicative of the turmoil that the institution called family is in. Albee has consciously created, yet again, a domineering wife. She is loud-mouthed, boisterous and ill-tempered. She is more vocal than her husband who is certainly intellectually superior to other characters of the play. Her’s is surely not the ideal womanhood that the Americans envisioned for their society. She is clearly out of tune as a loving wife. Her verbal
pyrotechnics proves this point effectively. The family structure, as presented by Albee, is clearly falling down; and life in the New Carthage Campus, with people like Martha, George, Nick and Honey, is getting denuded of joy, purpose and any meaning. The campus couples have money but many other finer aspects are certainly missing. The highly disturbing picture of the New Carthage has once again proved Albee’s notion of his theatre. He has certainly annoyed his audience by reflecting malignancy in marital affairs. Albee wants people to learn lessons from his shocking episodes shown on the stage.

Albee continues with the theme of familial relationships in his first Pulitzer winning play A Delicate Balance. Here, Albee gets to grip with the relationships of contemporary American society and its family. According to Gerry McCarthy, the play “brings Albee into a closer relationship with the everyday rituals of life...” (83). Henry Hewes in his review of the play for the Saturday Review, 8 October, 1966, writes, “Having more or less disposed of the university and the church in his last two plays, Edward Albee has now chosen to weave his
intricate web around a more personal institution, American family life” (45).

A Delicate Balance was first produced at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, on 22 September 1966, in a staging directed by Alan Schneider. The play centres on Agnes and Tobias, a middle-aged suburban couple settled into an affluent but stultifying existence. The subtle delicate balance of their accommodation to each other is upset by the arrival for extended stays of their daughter, Julia, who has left her third husband, and the couple’s friends Harry and Edna, who are fleeing a vague but ominous dread of nothingness. The relationship of the domineering Agnes and the emasculated Tobias is further disrupted by the presence of Agnes’s alcoholic sister, Claire, who attempts to seduce Tobias but is rebuffed. In the course of the play, Agnes and Tobias come to an awareness of emptiness of their life together, and both repudiate their habitual roles. Agnes refuses to be the decision-maker and Tobias rouses himself from his lethargy to take the decisive action of allowing Harry and Edna remain in the house, despite the objections of Julia, who views them as intruders. The second couple,
however, decline to stay, realizing that the house offers them no refuge from their feelings of fear and alienation.

The initial reactions to the play, *A Delicate Balance*, are decidedly mixed. When it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, most regarded the decision as a belated attempt by the Pulitzer committee to atone for failing to give Albee the prize for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Subsequent commentators have sought to identify the unnamed fear that suffuses the play by investigating the issues of isolation, alienation, and individual identity. Despite diverse reactions, the play remains one of the much talked about plays of Albee. The focal point of this play is once again the problems in the affluent American family. A perusal of an account of the plot of the play seems inevitable to understand the precarious balance on which the relationships within the family hang.

*A Delicate Balance* presents a series of critical events in the life of a comfortable middle-aged couple, Agnes and Tobias. The scene is the living-room of a large well-appointed suburban house. The apparent stability and success of the couple’s
retirement is eroded from the opening lines of the play, and this erosion is the basic process Albee develops. The play opens with Agnes, a “handsome woman in her late 50s.” She is seen discussing the possibility of losing her mind. The comfortable scene is a delicate balance which, she feels, can apparently be disturbed. Speaking in a soft voice with a hint of a smile on her face, Agnes seems to be happy with the present state of peace in the house, despite the subject matter of her conversation about losing he mind. Her husband, Tobias, responds to her by reminding her that there is no saner woman on earth than herself. Tobias, as he speaks, seems to have nothing more important on his mind than deciding what kind of drink he wants to make for himself.

With anisette in his hand, Tobias tells Agnes that “we will all go mad before you” (ADB 1). Agnes feels she cannot go mad because she needs to take care of him. Though she feels okay, she continues to have the unknown fear about madness tormenting her. At one point, she refers to her musings of potential madness as theoretically healthy fear but she quickly corrects her definition to healthy speculation.
The couple is sitting together enjoying their drinks, when, somewhat disjointedly, Agnes brings up the topic of her sister Claire. Agnes exclaims that although she is astonished by her own thoughts of madness, it is her sister who astonishes her the most. But when asked by Tobias to explain her statement, Agnes declares that she doesn’t want to use an unkind word at the moment because the couple is being “cosy.” However, she astonishes Tobias by making degrading remarks about Claire. When she begins negatively criticizing her sister, Tobias stands up and moves to another chair, stating his reason as “It’s getting uncomfortable” (ADB, 6). Agnes comes back with the remark, “Things get hot, move off, huh? Yes? (6)”

Agnes continues to discredit her sister, and Tobias continually tries to discourage her, to the point of telling her that he thinks she should apologize to Claire. Agnes becomes a bit ruffled at the suggestion and then returns to her subject of possibly going mad but decides that she never could do such a thing because she is so stable. “There are no mountains in my life ... nor chasms. It is a rolling, pleasant land...” (9) she says. Claire
appears in the room and apologizes to Agnes. This catches Agnes off guard, and she asks “But what are you sorry for, Claire?” (12). Claire responds, “I apologize that my nature is such to bring out in you the full force of your brutality” (13) This brings out a long diatribe from Agnes concerning Claire’s lifestyle. At this point, Agnes leaves to telephone her daughter, Julia, and Tobias and Claire share a conversation and another drink.

Claire senses that Julia might be going through yet another divorce and predicts that Julia will be coming home shortly. She then suggests that when Julia does arrive, Tobias should shoot Julia, Agnes, and then herself. Tobias says that the only way he could commit such an act would be if he were in a high state of passion, which Claire laughs at, unable to see him outraged by anything. Emasculation is a recurrent theme in Albee’s plays. Here too Tobias stands emasculated. Claire laughs at Tobias only to suggest his submissive attitude which is quite contrary to the role pattern of husbands.

Agnes re-enters to announce that Julia is coming home. Tobias then tells the story of a cat that he once had. He and the cat pleasantly tolerated each
other until one day Tobias realized that the cat had been totally ignoring him. After several attempts to make the cat pay attention to him, Tobias ends up slapping the cat in the head. He says that he found he hated the cat because he felt as if she was accusing him of something, and shortly after this incident, Tobias took the cat to the “vet” and had it put to sleep. Claire and Agnes both assure him that he did the best he could. Claire further assures him that, he “probably did the right thing. Distasteful alternatives; the less ... ugly choice” (37)

There is a knock on the door, and Harry and Edna (Agnes and Tobias’s best friends) enter. They have been frightened by something intangible and do not want to return to their own home. They come to stay with Agnes and Tobias. The arrival of friends clearly disrupts the delicate balance of the house. The news of the Julia’s return after her yet another (third) divorce has already started tilting the balance towards madness of which Agnes was afraid.

The second act of the play opens with Agnes and her daughter Julia discussing the fact that Harry and Edna are occupying Julia’s old bedroom. Julia is not happy because her room is occupied by some intruders.
Agnes tries to pacify her, insisting that Julia must learn to accept the situation. Julia does not want to discuss anything. She does not know how why they are there. Harry and Edna have spent the entire day in their room, not coming out even for meals. Julia demands that they should leave her childhood room to herself, and leave the house for good.

Unable to convince Julia, Agnes leaves. Tobias then enters to join his daughter and at once they start throwing insults at one another. Julia whines about not having her room and the fact that no one seems to know why Harry and Edna are there or how long they are planning on staying. Tobias then discredits Julia for all the broken marriages that she has accumulated. There is mention of Julia’s brother who died while still young. The conversation between the daughter and her father throws enough light on the father’s inability to control things in the family. Julia proves to be a spoilt child. She is not able to derive any meaning from her sadly unsuccessful marriages. She gets married and goes out to live with renewed hopes. But, soon gets divorced and comes back disappointed. Julia’s life
is a painful pointer towards the crumbling concept of family life.

Claire chides Julia about her new divorce and about constantly returning home. Julia retorts by teasing her aunt Claire about her drinking. Agnes arrives to announce that dinner is ready. Everyone comes to the dining room except the friends who are still inside Julia’s room. When asked if she knows what is going on with Harry and Edna, Agnes informs that she has knocked on the door but too embarrassed to pursue the matter. However at the end of end of scene one of the Second Act, Harry and Edna appear to announce that they are going home but will return with their suitcases.

The next scene opens with Julia and Agnes in the room alone after dinner. Julia is disgusted with her mother’s desire to control everyone’s conversations and emotions. Then, once again, she returns to her insistence that she wants back her room. To this end, Agnes tells Julia to go up to the room, while Harry and Edna are gone, and barricade herself there. Claire enters and a heated discussion ensues, ending with the topic of what they should do about Harry and Edna. Claire says, “you’ve only got two choices,
Sis. You take ‘em in, or you throw ‘em out” (88). When Agnes and Tobias leave to help Harry and Edna (who have returned) unload their suitcases from their car, Julia asks Claire what she thinks Harry and Edna want. “Comfort,” replies Claire. This word of Claire brings to the fore the chief malaise of the contemporary American population. Things seem to be bright and affluent, but comfort is one thing that is clearly missing. Unknown fears cripple the lives clearly snatching away what Claire calls “comfort.” When Julia states that this is her home, Claire says, “We’re not a communal nation, dear, giving, but not sharing, outgoing, but not friendly. We submerge our truths and have our sunsets on untroubled waters” (93).

When Edna enters, she gets into an argument with Julia. Edna, in essence, tells Julia that it is time for her to grow up. Julia reminds Edna that she is a guest in the house. Edna responds that she and Harry are Agnes and Tobias’s best friends. When Harry enters the room, he goes to fix everyone a drink at the bar, but Julia stands in front of the bar and insists that he stays away from it. Julia becomes emotionally frustrated and starts yelling, “THEY
WANT” (97). Then she changes her statement to, “I want” and then “I WANT . . . WHAT IS MINE!!” (98). Julia leaves the room, and Agnes reminisces about the death of her son. She says that she suspects that Tobias has been “unfaithful,” and she asks Harry and Claire to confirm it, but they both deny it.

After Tobias announces that Julia is in hysterics, Julia appears in the room with a gun in her hand. She insists that Harry and Edna leave. She eventually gives the gun to Tobias, and Agnes says, “How dare you come into this room like that! How dare you embarrass me and your father?”(114). Edna then begins to criticize Julia, then declares that she and Harry are staying there forever if need be.

The third act begins with a conversation between Agnes and Tobias. Tobias has stayed up all night, having given up his room to his daughter and not feeling quite comfortable enough to sleep with his wife in her room. Agnes confesses that she saw Tobias standing in her room in the night and refers to him as a stranger. They ask one another if either has had a clear thought on what to do about Harry and Edna. Agnes defers to Tobias, telling him that it is
his role to make all the decisions. Tobias tells her that she is copping out. There is also a brief discussion between Tobias and Agnes about their sexual relationship. Agnes reminds Tobias of the times when he “spilled” himself on her “belly,” preventing Agnes from getting pregnant after the death of their son.

Near the end of act III, Claire, Julia, Tobias, and Agnes all discuss their versions of why Harry and Edna are there and what they should do about it. Then Harry and Edna join them, and everyone in the room is drinking, despite the early hour of the morning. Edna announces that Harry wants to talk to Tobias alone, and the women leave the room. Harry tells Tobias that if the circumstances were reversed, he and Edna don’t think they would allow Tobias and Agnes to live at their house, in spite of the fact that they are best friends. Then Harry asks Tobias, “You don’t want us, do you, Toby?” (159)

Tobias then delivers what the author refers to in the script notes as Tobias’s “aria.” It ends with Tobias answering that he does not really want Harry and Edna to stay there but because they are friends, Harry and Edna have the right to be there.
Agnes then talks with Edna as Tobias goes with Harry to get the suitcases and put them in the car. The play ends on Agnes’ thought that people sleep at night because they are afraid of the darkness. The play ends with the decision of the guest to leave the place despite Tobias’s decision that they have every right to stay.

Tobias and his wife feel comfortable in spite of the fear of madness. They lead a happy retirement life. But the delicate balance that keeps things going smoothly for them gets disturbed with the arrival in successive acts of their daughter Julia and of the best friends Harry and Edna. The balance which the couple sustain gets collapsed. The new arrivals establish the relationships of family and friendships, and place demands on the couple. Harry and Edna come because they are alone and fear the emptiness deriving from isolation in a seemingly neighbourly society. Julia returns to her parents each time she fails to establish a lasting marriage. The uninvited guests demonstrate the breakdown of family and friendships in a wider context. Tobias, Agnes, Harry and Edna belong to the “Now” generation while Julia is somewhere caught in between the now
and the nowhere generations. Honey, the wife of Nick in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, is afraid of delivering a baby, clearly putting the meaning of marriage in total disorder. However, she continues to live with Nick. But Julia, here, simply fails to sustain her marriage. Each time she gets married, she returns home divorced. The break down in relationships is what disturbs Albee. Through Edna, he informs us that “friendship is something like a marriage....” In the modern society, no human relationship is sacred and everlasting. *A Delicate Balance* is what he gives to disturb the audience.

In the words of Roudane, the play “is Albee’s most blatant staging of the existentialist predicament. He does not chart cataclysmic changes; rather, he intimates the subtle shifts in human relationships, shifts from engagement to habit, from commitment to estrangement, from love to indifference” (99). The play is about relationships and at the same time, it is also about wasted opportunities. The best example for the wasted opportunity can be related to the life of Julia. Tobias could have averted the divorces had he intervened and spoke to his daughter and to Tom or
Charlie or Phil, the husbands of Julia. He has failed in his responsibility as a father. He wasted chances that could have changed the life of his daughter. Realization comes too late in the play. This consciousness of the wasted opportunities is not there in the beginning, but towards the end Albee, once again, provides them with the life giving awareness. Hopefully, the couple in the play can overcome the emptiness that pervaded all their life.

In 1967, Albee announced that he was working on two short plays, “Life” and “Death,” and that the first was developing into a long play. In the event both developed into full-length pieces and McCarthy records that it was “Death” which was the first to be performed, in the version we now know as All Over, in March 1971 on Broadway. “Life” was to come later: as Seascape, performed in 1975(98). Both the plays, considered as companion plays, present family life, and the succession of human generations.

All Over presents a portrayal of a family which is in the process of disintegration. The play, both dramatically and visually, centres on a prominent man who lay dying unseen in a screened bed in his town house. His Mistress, his estranged Wife, his Son
and Daughter, and his Best Friend hold a death watch; they are joined in their vigil by the man’s elderly Doctor and a private Nurse. As they wait for death, they verbally explore their relationships with the dying man, and their relationships with each other. Those relationships have been shaped by the dying man during his life, and, in the characters’ exploration, are distorted by memory. Death comes at last -- it’s all over.

The scene of All Over is the room of a celebrated and remarkable man who is now dying. The other characters in the play have assembled for what is described as a ‘ritual’- the death watch. The dying man, screened up-stage in a canopied four-poster, has played various roles in the lives of the waiting characters. For the son and the daughter, he is the source of the love of which they have been deprived, and which stirs momentarily or is distorted into hatred or bitterness. To the wife, he is the love she knew briefly as a young wife but which she lost as she failed to grow into adulthood beside her husband. The Best Friend mirrors this wasted marriage in his own divorce and in his guilt for his own wife’s alienation and madness; and he looks back
on a brief sad affair with the dying man’s wife. To one side of the family is the figure of the Mistress, who won a different relationship by her willingness to accept love from a man whom she inevitably could not know. For her, his death means the extinction of that love; for others, it is the occasion for a bleak assessment of their lives.

The events are observed by Doctor and the Nurse, who fit in easily and familiarly into the scene, being no strangers to death. For them, as doctor and nurse, ministering to death is an integral part of their life. The process of dying is also watched by the public. Two photographers and a reporter are waiting outside for it is an important event in the society. The play opens with the words of the Wife who enquires, “Is he dead?” and ends with the words of the Doctor, who is eighty-six and who announces, “All Over.”

Albee offers only the most rudimentary information about the dying man. He is wealthy and famous, powerful enough to have freed himself from the hospital when the end was near and to have insisted on being brought home to die. As the family keeps its death-watch, the house is besieged by
reporters which the nurse interprets as a final test of fame. While waiting the man to die, the other characters who are close to him, talk about their past life. The wife has been married for fifty years to the dying man, but has been compelled to yield him to his Mistress, who was ten years younger than she was. The Wife has not been leading a happy married life. She was a little girl when he, her husband, came to her. Her concern over the little girl she once was rings throughout the play like a weary theme song. She repeats “when he came to me” again and again, clearly regretting her marriage with him. Her husband openly has an affair with the Mistress, but unbeknownst to her husband she had apparently carried on an affair with his Best Friend whose wife had gone insane. At the end of the play, the Wife sums up the comments of the death watchers: “All we’ve done... is think about ourselves.” (AO 112)

The Mistress, who is an intruder in the life of Wife, recalls her past. It has been twenty long years since she comes to the dying man. She also confesses that in addition to this affair, she has had two former husbands, and when an adolescent, an initiating sexual fling with a boy. She now has
money of her own and is in no sense a typical gold
digger. She also expresses her desire to carry out
the dying man’s wishes when he dies. She even turns
sympathetic to the Wife. She endeavours to slap some
sense into the Daughter (for slapping her mother).
The Best Friend recalls his past. He remains the
main cause for his wife insanity. It was his
decision to divorce his wife that turned her to lose
her sanity. He was called the Best Friend but he
confesses that he is not his best friend for he has
an illicit affair with the wife of his friend who is
now dying. These reminiscences of these hypocrites
clearly show the absence of love in these
relationships. Bigsby interprets All Over as “the
collapse of the spirit…the slow extinction of those
human qualities which might be used to counter the
natural absurdity of man’s condition” (163). The
companion play of All Over is Seascape which deals
with, in Albee’s word’s “Life.”

With Seascape, Edward Albee won his second
Pulitzer Prize for drama. Albee himself directed
this Broadway production, which opened on January 26,
1975, at the Sam S. Shubert Theatre. Like many of
Albee’s plays, Seascape focuses on communication in
interpersonal relationships, in this case between couples. Albee’s first successful play, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), and his first Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *A Delicate Balance* (1966), are also about this, now Albee’s favourite, theme. *Seascape* continues Edward Albee’s exploration of human relationships. However, *Seascape* is different from these dramas on several counts. The play is not strictly a drama but it, according to various critics, has elements of comedy, fantasy, satire, and absurdism. In *Seascape*, Nancy and Charlie, an American couple, on the verge of the major life change of retirement, are having problems in their relationship. They are discussing these matters on the beach when another couple appears, two human-sized lizards named Leslie and Sarah who speak and act like people. The lizards have evolved to such a degree that they no longer feel at home in the sea and are compelled to seek life on the land. What the lizards experience with Nancy and Charlie nearly drives them back to the sea, but with an offer of help from the human couple, they decide to stay. Unlike Albee’s other plays, this play ends on a happy and positive note which many critics find refreshing.
Nancy and Sarah are the two female characters in the play. Of these two, Nancy is a human being. Like the other woman characters, she too is more dominant in her family life. She can be called one other variant of Mommy. At the beginning of the play she is shown to be in a sort of a struggle with her husband Charlie, the bone of contention being their future after their retirement life. She is more dominant than her husband and wants to take chances. The other female character Sarah is a human-sized lizard, which emerged with her mate, Leslie, from the sea to live on the land. Sarah generally defers to Leslie, giving her opinion when asked but rarely acting on her own. The contrast between these two characters echoed some of the changes women’s status and position in the United States were undergoing when the play was written. Nancy is depicted as more evolved (liberated) than Sarah, literally and physiologically.

The 1970s were a dynamic time in American history, especially for women. After the civil rights movement and the social activist revolution of the 1960s, feminism and the rights of women emerged as one of the major social issues of the time. Many
women no longer regarded homemaking as their primary goal in life. Greater numbers of women were becoming more educated and entering the workforce. More education meant more employment opportunities and life options for women. Women became more outspoken about what they wanted in their own lives and from their partners in a number of areas. Still, feminism was controversial in American society. A number of men and even some women feared these changes would negatively affect the family and threaten the status of American men. In some ways, these opponents were correct; for example, the divorce rate did rise in this time period. These issues about women and related controversies were examined on a number of fronts in popular culture, including films, television programs, and plays.

These ideas comprise one subtext of *Seascape*. Arguably, the main character and the vital life force of the play is Nancy. Nancy is near retirement age, but her actual age is not stated. Though it is implied that she stayed home and raised her family while her husband worked, Nancy is ready to experience more of life now that they are free. Like many women of the 1970s, she is suffering from empty
nest syndrome. All of her three children have been raised and have left home, indeed, Nancy and Charlie have grandchildren. When Charlie retires, he would like to rest and “do ... nothing.” She would like to meet new and interesting people and go out and see the world. Nancy wants to evolve away from her role as “mother” in order to create her own identity. Charlie wants no part of it.

Nancy repeatedly expresses her dissatisfaction with her role as wife and mother. Reflecting on a time earlier in their marriage when Charlie was distant and their problems were not discussed, Nancy muses to him, “Good wife, patient, see him through it, whatever it is, wonder if it isn’t something you haven’t done, or have; write home for some advice, but oh, so busy, with the children and the house. Stay neat; don’t pry; weather it” (SS 21). Later, when Charlie reminds her of what a good husband and family man he has been to her, Nancy agrees but is also “slightly bitter” as the stage directions describe her. She tells him, “Well, we’ll wrap you in the flag when you’re gone, and do taps” (24) Nancy cannot accept that they have had the “good life” that Charlie keeps going on about, because for
her, life is not something in the past that is over and done with.

Charlie plays the role of the threatened man of the time period. It is Charlie who puts a damper on Nancy’s plan to live travelling from beach to beach. He repeatedly dismisses her needs and desires. Charlie tells Nancy over and over in act I that she would not like living at the beach or any other active lifestyle. She resists his attempts to control her, and goes as far as to admit she might like to have her ideal life without him. Though she eventually retreats somewhat from her beach-combing plan in act I, the idea of divorce reoccurs later in the act, and she threatens to travel alone several times in the Second Act. Nancy surprises Charlie by telling him that during a problematic time in their marriage, she thought he was having an affair. For a time, she considered having an affair herself as well as divorcing him. Charlie shows that he is repeatedly concerned with his own plans for the future and wants no part of Nancy’s adventurous ideas. He cannot see what he specifically and they as a couple would gain. He seems unconcerned, perhaps unbelieving, that he might lose her. The
part concerning these two characters in the play shows some of the causes for disintegration of families and divorces. Yet another Albee family is presented here, where allegiance in marriage is seriously threatened.

Marriage gives a unique relationship between two strangers. They are united by the nuptial knots, blessing them to remain together till death separates them. They are expected to be faithful to each other and if they do so, they can have a claim to be the most successful marital partners. Unfortunately this spirit of allegiance and togetherness has become a forlorn forgotten concept. They remain together while, in many ways, remain strangers. Couples, in modern days, can have claims to have lived decades together, but the decay in their life remains a sad reality.

Albee once again gives vent to his disappointment over the sad picture of familial strives in his country with another Pulitzer winning experiment on the stage. The new play is the most autobiographical of Albee’s plays. Three Tall Women is the name of the play where Albee presents a compelling woman of more than ninety years old as the
protagonist of the play. The old lady, named in the play as A, reflects on her life with a mixture of shame, pleasure, regret, and satisfaction. She recalls the fun of her childhood and her marriage, when she had an overwhelming optimism for her future. Yet she bitterly recalls the negative events that resulted in regret: her husband’s extramarital affairs, the death of her husband, and the estrangement of her gay son.

The woman’s relationship with her son is the clearest indication that Albee is working through some troubled memories of his own in Three Tall Women. The playwright was raised by conservative New England foster parents who disproved of his homosexuality. Like the son in his play, he left home at eighteen. Besides exorcising some personal demons with the play, Albee regained some respect among New York theatre critics. Many critics despised that the playwright, who showed such promise during the 1960s and 1970s, had dried up creatively. In fact, Three Tall Women was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1994, as well as the Drama Critics Circle, and Outer Critics Circle awards for the best play.
Like the other women characters of his earlier plays, A too has viewed marriage as a means to a secure future. Through her recollections in the play, it is learnt that she was born to a lower-middle-class family, to parents who may have been overly strict or overly permissive. She was sent to live in New York City by her parents with the hope that she would one day marry a rich man. Her mission is clearly ‘marry rich.’ Since A has no fortune of her own for a safe and secure future, a rich marriage seems the most important mission of her life. Her choices are undoubtedly limited, and she ends up marrying a rich, short, one-eyed man whose wit and fortune are real enough but whose social cachet is obviously yet to be determined by her. By her own account, A does her job admirably, and she and her husband end an American version of horsey country gentry.

There are two other women characters in the play, justifying the title *Three Tall Women*. The two other characters are also named in the similar fashion - B and C. B is a middle aged woman and is the caretaker of A in the play while C comes as a beautiful young lawyer. When the play opens A comes
to the house of A to brief her on her financial affairs. With her beauty and youth, C is incapable of either sympathy or empathy. She is clearly unable to even imagine that she could ever turn into a peevish, impotent old woman. She’s is impatient at having to listen to the reminiscences of A, even though A was once a great beauty like herself.

The first act of the play ends rather abruptly when A suffers a stroke in mid-sentence. Act two of the play presents a wonderful kind of reversal of fates that can only happen in the theatre. In the second act the experimentative traits of Albee comes to the fore. The old woman, the caretaker and the young lawyer of the first act are turned into one character as representing one character at different stages of her life. C becomes A, representing A in her youth, into a slightly insipid narcissistic twenty-six years of age. She surprises everyone with her determination to have a little fun before she settles down to a marriage that she openly acknowledges will be more about business than love. The echoes of the words of Nurse, Mommy and Nick can be heard here. Marriage becomes a matter of business and love is clearly out of picture. The consumerist
attitude is once again brought to light by the
playwright. The entrepreneurial bend of mind views
everything as means to property, even a child is seen
only as a future source of income and security. B,
the caretaker in the first act, gets transformed into
A in sumptuous middle age, a woman truly in her
prime. The three women spar with one another to show
what really happened, or should have happened.

If a middle-aged A had the best perspective, an
elderly A is the most contemplative, the most capable
of parsing out what exactly it was that she
accomplished or failed to accomplish. She no longer
cares about the luxurious surroundings she has spent
her entire life struggling to obtain, and in fact is
no longer sure the struggle was worth it. The
elderly A understands, only at the fag end of her
life that all her exercises in life seem mere
glitters.

Betrayal is one disease that continues to infect
the Albee families. A in *Three Tall Women* is no
exception. A’s calculated relationships with men
have usually eventuated in a betrayal of some sort,
for they have been built upon a confusion of the
material and the immaterial, as if some object could
ever be the measure love. A is the third wife of her husband. He is rich and gives her lots of jewellery and pretty things in return for sexual favours. Bottoms observes that "there has been an element of commodity exchange about their relationship" (86). A, the old woman, recounts an apparently decisive time when she was sitting nude, except for her jewellery, at her dressing table after a party, and her husband entered naked, with a diamond bracelet on his erect penis, wanting her to fellate him. She refused to do that. "I could never do that, and I said, No! I can’t do that!" He loses his erection, and the bracelet falls "deep into (her) lap. Keep it, he said, and he turned and walked out" (TTW, 56).

This recollection is a clear indication of the kind of relationship A had with her husband. It reveals the actual fracture in their marriage. A weeps slowly and inconclusively. She is consoled by B. A continues to confess that she has been unfaithful to her husband, committing adultery with the groom in the stable. Her betrayal is seen by her son who starts using her betrayal against her. She says her affair began mostly in self-pity and revenge for her husband’s infidelity. Her husband has money
hence has many extra-marital affairs. This angers her resulting in revenge. She learns to put up with all these things because of the fear of losing financial security and all the luxury that she has been enjoying since her marriage. The affair with the groom has a pleasure of its own sake, but she does not want to continue the affair. She has fired the groom rather than risk losing the "good deal with the penguin (her husband), a long-term deal" (94)

Marriage has become a means to enter into a deal and the whole life is sort of commodities exchange. Albee families are also infected with another disease- the gay affairs. Jerry has an affair with the superintendent’s son. The gay concept appears in A Delicate Balance too, and once again in Three Tall Women where A has a gay son. A mentions about her gay son who was sent out because of his gay relations. It is wildly believed that in a family if the mother is domineering and the father emasculated, the son inevitably turns to be a gay. Albee believes in this popular faith of his generation and his plays are witness to this theory. Albee has all along been talking about bad marriages in almost all the early plays. And, for the first time, in his Marriage
Play, he tries to say that a bad marriage is better than no marriage at all. *Marriage Play* is the next from the Albee canon, firing once again the conflicts which afflict families.

The play titled *Marriage Play* is a two-act, two-character play with a disturbing aura akin to that of his earlier play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* It focuses on a married couple and their belief that even a bad marriage is better than no marriage at all. Vienna’s English Theatre, a full-time professional producer of English-language drama East of Britain, launched the world premiere of *Marriage Play*. The play was directed by the author himself during the 1987 Festival of Vienna. It is structured so that its middle-aged and unhappy pair, Jack and Gillian, swing rhythmically back and forth between episodes of violence and calm, gall and honey. Sheer cacophony rings out in bitter times of jabbing and slapping, followed by harmony in their good times when they recall old love and touch each other. The fully staged marital battles give free reign to violence and reflect a trend in contemporary drama, where terror has reappeared as violence.
For twenty-three years, Gillian has kept a record of the couple’s touching. Her journal contains over two thousand entries noting date, position, duration, effect, and conversation if any. As the curtain rises she is curled in her chair, alone for the moment, reciting aloud with smug pleasure selected intimate passages from her journal. Jack and Gillian scratch and claw on the floor at the close of Act I, and the spectacle is sure to hit the audience hard. By making the prone and caterwauling couple with their bodies entwined and aroused pull their upper torsos slightly apart, and look with wide-eyed interest at each other, Albee makes the audience the unwilling voyeurs. But then a hard jab of a knee at a crotch breaks the clinch of the lower regions and we ease back with a twinge of shame at our error. The close of the play makes us squirm, with the pair by now inured to pain, husband and wife are sunk in the lacklustre comfort of each one’s special chair, relieved at having rounded off one more exercise in futility. The play is not about why a relationship fails; rather it is a dramatization of why a failed one continues.
Jack and Gillian hazard the words “vacuum,” “void,” and “nothingness,” but cling to what they have, accept its anguish, perhaps in terror of facing a life with no relationship at all, a ritual-less vacuum sans birthdays and orchid corsages. Their dread of nothingness is a personalization of mankind’s primal fear of the unknown and uncertain. The play depicts what this fear engenders: a lethargic pseudo-serenity that too frequently follows halfway reconciliations after marital battles and precludes a real effort to resolve deeper issues. In the play’s marital battles, Albee, like Beckett and Pinter, settles for the impact of physical shock rather than opting for a gradual approach to violence through terror. Jarring blows to the head and hard kicks to the viscera occur to the tune of “you piece of filth” and “you withered woman.” These onslaughts, unpremeditated as in life, often flash onstage unanticipated. Hence our imaginations have no time to work and we are deprived of much of the pleasure of terror. It takes time to make our flesh crawl. Battles aside, the playwright does give its audience time to observe other interactions of the pair and to build up fears for them. Gillian
responds to abuses (a blow to her head, a slur at her intellect, a slam of the door) with facetious retorts and smirks that are open invitations to more abuse. Whenever she sees Jack make a solid attempt to leave the marriage (apart from his cry-wolf attempts in Act I), she alerts herself to danger and calls upon her wiles to hold him.

The impact of the play springs from the recognition that this wife, any wife, can live day to day more in terror of being left than in dread of being hit. Albee, as director of his own play, has chosen a partly presentational style. Important passages begin as exchanges between Jack and Gillian but end as downstage or off-centre monologues where the actors speak with eyes front.

Notwithstanding, the play comes alive onstage and arrests the audience through starkly contrasting visual elements to depict the couple’s sometimes warm, sometimes cool reaction to each other’s physical presence. When this “withered woman” wants to draw a show of affection from her mate, she attempts coy glances and sensual gyrations of her thin hips and shoulders to arouse him, but Jack’s stolid response is just one delayed and feeble clap
of palms that lie in his lap, a stark picture of a man unaroused.

There is no hint of the economic or social level of Jack and Gillian so that they may represent any couple, anywhere. Jack is the self-absorbed husband, whose infidelities are called “dalliances” by his wife. Jack’s weakness, which is not the subservience of Albee’s “daddies” in plays like *The American Dream* and *Sandbox*, but rather a boring preoccupation with self along with a penchant for spouting philosophical hogwash at us. His efforts are mockingly assessed by Gillian as his “attempts at TROOF” (truth).

Gillian emerges as the less dominant of the couple, yet one not to be bested. The language of the play surges with rhetorical power. A flow of sound and sense comes at us through Albee’s frequent use of classic lists. Gillian counts off for us the weaknesses of this man who she had hoped so foolishly in her youth would fall in love with her. She flows through an extensive list of adjectives in a periodic phrase that paradoxically grows lovelier as it becomes more caustic, to the end that we sit motionless to absorb the full impact. Language is
also used for comic effect, as in Jack’s attempts at rhetoric to make his wife take his anxieties seriously.

The power of the play’s archetypal themes and the impact of its spectacle make it a disturbing evening of theatre. The terrifying undercurrent of Albee’s play is the sense that while being human entails more than “being,” it is relationships that create our existence, and the quality of those relationships defines the quality of that existence. Too often we may choose to become human corpses, emotional zombies, or worse, spiritual vampires, viciously, violently feeding on the very souls of our acquaintances to maintain our existence.

Albee’s perennial concern with the dysfunctional American family is more shockingly and more effectively reflected in his most devastating play, *The Goat or Who’s Sylvia?* As it has been already stated, Albee is perhaps, the first ever dramatist to give a sympathetic treatment of bestiality on the stage. Albee and controversy go hand in hand. And, once again, this play on bestiality becomes a concern of the reviewers. The responses to this calculated shock value of bestiality are mixed, with “opinions
ranging from disgust to adulation” (Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee, p.203). The Goat is certainly a deeply serious and disquieting play about the vagaries of human passion.

The play The Goat begins during the week in which Martin, a successful architect who is happily married and the father of a college-age son turns fifty. In the same week, the audience learns, Martin has also received the equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize in architecture, the Pritzger Prize, and, in addition, he has just been commissioned to design a multibillion-dollar city of the future to be erected in the fields of the Midwest. Martin’s oldest friend Ross, a television journalist, is about to tape an at-home interview with Martin in his tasteful abode. Before the taping, Martin appears nervous and forgetful; he cannot recall the names of friends or the origins of the business cards he finds in his coat pocket. He chats with his wife, Stevie, and in casual conversation lets slip the comment that he is having an affair with a goat. She laughs, assuming he is making a jest, and responds that she will stop by the feed store on her way home.
Stevie leaves for a hair appointment and the taping begins, but the interview quickly becomes a futile endeavour; Martin is distracted and uncooperative. Once the camera is turned off, however, Ross and Martin talk as intimate friends, and the cause of Martin’s behaviour is revealed. Martin tells Ross that he and Stevie have bought a farm, a second home to enhance their stable, wonderful, long-term marriage, one in which there has been no desire to be unfaithful on either side in the nearly twenty-five years they have been together. However, Martin tells Ross, on this farm there is a goat, a goat with eyes that have captivated Martin and evoked in him a passion that has led to his first extra-marital love affair, one that has been going on for nearly six months.

Ross is understandably appalled by this revelation, and, on the surface at least, believing he is helping his friend, writes a note to Stevie. The climactic confrontation that follows forces Martin to confess, both to Stevie and to their son Billy, who is gay, that, indeed, the romance with the goat named Sylvia is no joke. Martin tries to explain, and Stevie tries to understand. Martin
offers in his defence that this is his first affair and that he is still happily married, but there is his love for Sylvia to be dealt with. Stevie’s rage crackles in the air as she tries to process this strange confession. She screams, throws a vase, upends furniture, and even destroys a painting in frustration, and her emotionally intense, often sarcastic, dialogue reveals that she, unlike Martin, fully recognizes the devastation of both her marriage and their life together that Martin’s actions have wrought.

After initial outrage, anger, and resentment, Billy, with whom Martin has had a good relationship despite the fact that he never understood Billy’s sexual orientation, manages to find understanding and forgiveness for his father’s odd infidelity. In the play’s final scene, Ross appears to witness a moment of complex intimacy between father and son, as Edward Albee dares to probe even more deeply into the confusing intersections of love and sexuality. However, the audience is left to infer that Stevie is a woman of action, and in tragic Greek fashion, this breaking of taboo demands a ritual sacrifice. The actual death of Sylvia is not shown on stage, but the
horrifying result, and Martin’s lonely cries at his total loss, linger as the audience is left to draw its own conclusions about the fate of Martin and his family.

Extra-marital affairs are commonplace and there is actually nothing so shocking about it. But, this new play by this ever controversial playwright shocks everyone when the hero of the play confesses his extra-marital affair. A married man falling in love with another woman may not be shocking unless “the another” woman happens to be a goat. When Martin could not carry on with the show, his friend Ross comforts him. Martin shares with his friend an Edenic reverie of the American pastoral ideal -- a departure from his urban center toward a rural vista that his own professional vision soon thereafter fuses into the dream city design. He describes a trip “about sixty miles out” of town in search of “a real country place” for himself and Stevie. He gives him a near romantic view of the place and eventually his meeting with her, “...and it was then that I saw her..Just...just looking at me” (42). Ross, understanding that he is getting something out of his friend, asks if he talked to her. Martin replies:
Martin: “Hunh! Yes; yes, I did. I went up to her, to where she was, and I spoke to her, and she came toward me and ... and those eyes, and I touched her face, and ... (abrupt) I don’t want to talk about it; I can’t talk about it.

Ross: All right; let me help you. You’re seeing her.

Martin: (Sad laugh) Yes; oh, yes; I’m seeing her.

Ross: You’re having an affair with her.

Martin: (Confused) A what? Having a what?

Ross: (Hard) You’re screwing her.

Martin: (Sudden vision of it) Yes; yes; I’m screwing her, Oh, Jesus! (43)

As Martin begins to see his actions from Ross’s perspective, he breaks down, crying out Sylvia’s name. Ross, respectfully asks Martin, “Who is Sylvia?” Martin withdraws a photo from his wallet and hands it to Ross, who guffaws and then realizes the awful truth: “THIS IS A GOAT! YOU’RE HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH A GOAT! YOU’RE FUCKING A GOAT!” (46)

The playwright shocks not only Ross but the entire audience, in fact, the entire theatre fraternity. Martin’s violation is nothing but an expression of his sense of extreme alienation and longing. Allegiance in marriage is shown to be in total disarray. Man going to the extent of having affairs with animals lays bare the painful realities
of marriage life in the modern days. The trees are certainly denuded of love, of affection and genuine affinity. The prime societal concerns of Albee are about the loss of humane aspects that have been carried away by the current of emerging dreams and desires of the society.